

Message Text

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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT AND PRESS SEEK COMPROMISE ON POLITICAL
CENSORSHIP PROPOSALS

REF: TEL AVIV 0467

SUMMARY: IN RESPONSE TO STRONG NEGATIVE REACTION FROM EDITORS AND JOURNALISTS TO GOI POLITICAL CENSORSHIP PROPOSALS, KNESSET FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE HAS DEFERRED FURTHER ACTION PENDING GOI-EDITORS COMMITTEE CONSULTATIONS TO WORK OUT COMPROMISE ARRANGEMENT. EDITORS ARE CONSIDERING VOLUNTARY CENSORSHIP INITIATIVE WHICH, WHILE IT MIGHT RESOLVE CURRENT CONFRONTATION, SEEMS UNLIKELY TO STEM DEEPLY-ENTRENCHED PRACTICE OF LEAKS. END SUMMARY.

1. KNESSET FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE JANUARY 20 DEFERRED ACTION ON PROPOSED GOVERNMENT ORDER EXTENDING CENSORSHIP TO POLITICAL/DIPLOMATIC SPHERE, SPECIFICALLY AS REGARDS: A) SECRET MESSAGES BETWEEN ISRAEL AND FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS; AND B) CONTACTS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND COUNTRIES WITH WHICH IT DOES NOT MAINTAIN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. POSTPONEMENT CAME IN WAKE OF STORM OF PROTEST
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BY EDITORS AND JOURNALISTS, INCLUDING APPEALS TO KNESSET

TO BLOCK ADOPTION OF PROPOSED MEASURES, AND INDICATIONS THAT MAPAM AND NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY COMMITTEE MEMBERS WERE NOT PREPARED TO SUPPORT RABIN-ZADOK PROPOSALS.

2. EDITORS COMMITTEE HAS INDICATED ITS READINESS IN PRINCIPLE TO APPLY VOLUNTARY CENSORSHIP ON CERTAIN HIGHLY SENSITIVE POLITICAL/DIPLOMATIC INFORMATION, AND BURDEN IS NOW ON PRESS TO COME UP WITH CONCRETE PROPOSALS. MEDIA HAS PORTRAYED DECISION BY RABIN AND ZADOK TO POSTPONE VOTE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMITTEE AS SETBACK TO GOVERNMENT AND FURTHER INSTANCE IN WHICH IT IS FORCED TO BACK DOWN UNDER PRESSURE. JUSTICE MINISTER ZADOK, ON OTHER HAND, INSISTED IN ISRAELI RADIO INTERVIEW JANUARY 21 THAT GOVERNMENT HAD NOT CAPITULATED BUT THAT INSTEAD EDITORS HAD CHANGED THEIR POSITION FROM WHAT IT WAS A WEEK AGO. ACCORDING TO ZADOK, EDITORS PREVIOUSLY WERE UNWILLING TO CONSIDER VOLUNTARY CENSORSHIP ARRANGEMENTS AND GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE HAD NOW FORCED THEIR HAND.

3. MEMBER OF HAARETZ EDITORIAL STAFF HAS GIVEN US ACCOUNT DOVETAILING WITH ZADOK'S VERSION OF EVENTS, AND ADDING THAT DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENTS LAST WEEK HAD PROPOSED VOLUNTARY CENSORSHIP INITIATIVE BUT EDITORS HAD REFUSED. ACCORDING TO HAARETZ SOURCE RABIN CAME UP WITH PROPOSAL FOR GOVERNMENT-ENFORCED CENSORSHIP AS A NEGOTIATING POSITION TO IMPRESS ON EDITORS AND JOURNALISTS NEED TO STOP OR AT LEAST REDUCE FLOW OF LEAKS. HE KNEW THIS WOULD NOT STICK. BOTH SIDES WERE NOW MOVING IN DIRECTION OF COMPROMISE WHICH RABIN HAD ENVISAGED ALL ALONG. PROBLEM, SOURCE ADDED, WAS THAT COMPROMISE WHILE PROVIDING NOMINAL CORRECTIVE WAS UNLIKELY TO PROVE EFFECTIVE IN STEMMING LEAKS.

4. MOST PRESS COMMENTARY REGARDS EDITORS COUNTER-INITIATIVE AS OPENING WAY TO POSSIBLE SOLUTION AND EXPRESS SATISFACTION WITH POSTPONEMENT OF KNESSET ACTION. IN COGENTLY ARGUED DISSENT, JERUSALEM POST'S DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT DAVID LANDAU WRITES THAT ANY PRESS AGREEMENT TO BLANKET CONFIDENTIAL

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ARRANGEMENT COVERING ENTIRE AREAS OF DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY WOULD REPRESENT PRESS ACQUIESCENCE IN CURTAILMENT OF ITS INDEPENDENCE. HE RECOMMENDS THAT BETTER ANSWER WOULD BE FOR GOVERNMENT TO INFORM PRESS IN ADVANCE OF SPECIFIC DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGES OF EXTREME SENSITIVITY WHICH IT WISHES TO REMAIN SECRET.

5. COMMENT: WE CANNOT JUDGE WHETHER RABIN'S INTENTIONS OR MOTIVES

WERE AS DESCRIBED PARA 3, BUT PASS THE ACCOUNT ON AS
COMING FROM USUALLY RELIABLE SOURCE. WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT
JOURNALISTS AND EDITORS BELIEVE THAT REAL SOLUTION
FOR PROBLEM OF LEAKS DEPENDS NOT ON MUZZLING PRESS
BUT ON GOVERNMENT LEADERS OWN EFFORTS AND DETERMINATION
TO PROTECT THE MOST HIGHLY SENSITIVE INFORMATION.
WHETHER VOLUNTARY ARRANGEMENT CAN BE WORKED OUT AND
IMPLEMENTED REMAINS TO BE SEEN.
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